

Protests and Demonstrations

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Large demonstrations are fairly common in Paris. Protests are staged to express various interests, including those of farmers, labor unions, political parties, and anti-American groups.

On two occasions in the past 10 months, France experienced incidents of violence stemming from demonstrations. In November 2005, for three weeks, the suburbs of Paris experienced nightly arson attacks on cars and several other structures in response to the death of two North African teens at the hands of the police. Generally, only property was destroyed and injuries were mostly minor. In March 2006, several demonstrations occurred over a highly unpopular labor law. During the protests, property was damaged, anarchists beat many participants, and confrontations with police were frequent. After the law was dropped, the protests subsided. As recently as late May 2006 violence again flared in the Montfermeil suburb of Paris after police arrested a youth suspected of robbery. The ensuing disturbance saw part of the city hall burned, cars set ablaze and stones thrown at police officers.

It is important to note that anarchist, black bloc, and other extremists often blend into peaceful protests and cause problems. Consequently, it is difficult for law enforcement to identify potentially dangerous individuals. Extremists often show up at a legitimate demonstration and then begin to cause trouble.

Because of the potential for these types of groups to be present during demonstrations, personnel are encouraged to stay clear of demonstrations. Police intervention in demonstrations could be sudden and catch the unwary off-guard. In addition, the congestion caused by large demonstrations could cause major inconveniences.